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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Well, you can certainly tell that our autumn weather is upon us. It's a little chillier than normal here in the Northeast. As Joe mentions further on in his comments, our leaf-peeping season is just about over. It occurred slowly to the north of us, but rapidly sped by here in this area. After a couple of trips to Maine the past few weeks, however, I did get a chance to enjoy the fall colors. There's nothing like the fall in New England!

I did get a chuckle out of Joe's comments this week. As you'll likely recall, Joe, over the past number of years, has made it a point to "bust 'em" on me because I tend to enjoy my various outdoor projects. He, on the other hand, never had to worry about them because he was a tenant in a two-family house; his landlord tended to all of those "chores" over the years. Now that Joe is a homeowner himself, he's starting to realize that these projects are actually enjoyable (for the most part!).

As kids, we used to have to do a lot of these things because our parents asked/told us to do them. Most of the time, I didn't mind because I used to get paid to mow the lawn or shovel the snow from the driveway. But, these were things that we usually didn't volunteer to do, and didn't really appreciate them. As adults, and as homeowners, these things take on a more personal meaning - we tend to enjoy the fruits of our labor. It's a good feeling to see a well-manicured lawn, or a garden in full bloom. Even being able to get out of the driveway after a snowstorm is a great feeling!

So, here it is almost Halloween (a great holiday, by the way!). I've already cleaned the yard of leaves three times this season. I'm trying to keep up with them this year, now that I seem to have the time. But, it's still "early" so my trees still have plenty of leaves. That should change this weekend because we're expecting some heavy rain and winds. That should bring the majority of leaves down and give me a chance to finish up early for a change! And maybe by then, a number of household project items that I have on outstanding order will finally arrive so I can really get going on my inside "honey-do" list of projects!

So, as I finish up my plans to decorate for the holiday and figure out how gruesome I'll make myself appear for the "trick 'o' treaters" this year, I'll let you get going on this week's issue. Thanks to the many folks who have offered suggestions to my Atari and PC woes (and the offers for various hardware components!). I hope that soon I'll be able to move back to my Falcon to be able to do A-ONE more efficiently!

Until next time...

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Libhyp-based HYP View Web Service Updated

A small but in eyes of others quite significant feature addition gives uses the ability to browse ST-Guide .hyp files that are hidden within various archive files stored all around the Atari related WEB.

This is supposed to be a major step up in its overall usability level. Just use the software package URL to see the documentation.

For example:

http://libhyp.atari.org/hypview.cgi?url=http://users.skynet.be/atarix...ew.zip

http://libhyp.atari.org/

mmSAP 1.3 Is Out

* Separate archives for both variants were removed. Now there is only one archive but two compile scripts.

* GUI improved. SAP tune info is encapsulated with scrollpane, so program window keeps its size and does not expand wildly.

* New configuration option - Expand SAP tune info at startup.

Enjoy listening to new ASMA 3.1 tunes with mmSAP

Additional link for atarians from former Czechoslovakia:

http://www.baktra.wz.cz/software/mmsap.html

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. I’m sorry for missing our time together last week, but unfortunately there just weren’t enough posts to put together a good column.

Let’s move on to other things, shall we? Let’s try autumn in New England. It’s been a rather strange fall here. The combination of

precipitation, warm and cool episodes, and whatever else has resulted in a short leaf-peaking season.

It’s one of the aspects of buying a house that I had never even thought of. There’s a large tree in my front yard that half a dozen neighbors have stopped to tell me about. "Usually in the fall that’s the most beautiful tree on the street", one man told me. "But this year, it don’t seem to have put on its usual show". At first I had thought that he was implying that the lackluster autumn show had something to do with the fact that I had bought the house, but the guy’s face showed a real sense of disappointment and not a trace of accusation, humorous or otherwise.

For the short time that the leaves were changing before they fell to the ground, waiting for me to rake them up, the colors of the leaves on this particular tree was simply beautiful. They were bright and vivid... like something you’d see on a postcard or calendar or something. But Mother Nature was in a rush this year, and the whole process from green to gold and red and orange to brown and on the ground took just a little over a week. Then it fell to me to get them out to the road so that they could be vacuumed up.

You may not know it, folks, but right now our illustrious publisher is sitting back in his chair and laughing his butt off. When Dana and his wife moved into their house, Dana took got great enjoyment from working on his yard and I, believe it or not, busted his chops about it a little. Well, okay. MORE than a little. But it wasn’t because I didn’t understand the attraction. It was because... well, it was just because. <G>

When my wife and I were living in our apartment (the first floor of a 2 family house), the landlord took care of the yard work. And, since I grew up helping my parents with yard work, I’d had my fill of it for a while.

Now that I own the yard (well, me and the bank, anyway), I find it comforting and even relaxing to do things like cutting the lawn and tending to trees and shrubs. Heck, I’d always known that I COULD do the work, but it wasn’t until now that I’d started using it as my ’alone time".

Well, enough of that. Let’s get to the news and stuff, okay?

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

Philipp Reichmuth asks about compatibility between fVDI and AES:

"I’m currently experimenting with ARAnyM 0.9.4ß. The stock setup (EmuTOS, FreeMiNT 1.16-cur, fVDI, XaAES) is running fine.

However, I’m trying to run the original AES 4 instead (for a particular nostalgic reason) and can’t get it to cooperate with fVDI; however without fVDI it’s dead slow. (It’s supposed to be slow, but not THIS slow.) I’ve been trying under TOS 4.04 with a floppy disk image with MultiTOS, under TOS 4.04 with FreeMiNT and under EmuTOS with FreeMiNT, so I guess the underlying layers don’t matter too much. Symptoms are the same: fVDI loads, the resolution changes, I get a black ARAnyM

screen (or white at color depths <= 4) with a mouse cursor and nothing happens. All three configurations work fine with XaAES (after the resolution change, black screen for a second or so and then the XaAES screen.)

Is there a known incompatibility between fVDI and AES 4.1? Does this happen on a Falcon, too?"

Francois Le Coat tells Philipp:

"The work has already been done for you :)

In order to boot ARAnyM under plain TOS4.04, you need a disk image. A disk image was published with AFROS distribution, but AFROS is not anymore a disk image (but a diskless configuration) so it is not suitable to boot TOS4.04. The reason is that TOS cannot be bootstrapped.

I maintain since a long period, a disk image that used to be compatible with AFROS, and that is a disk bootable configuration handling both TOS or EmuTOS. It is a 8Mb image that contains freeMiNT+XaAES plus a variety of required utilities and applications that I still use on my own Hades060, proved working safe and UTD.

Minimal required system at <http://eureka.atari.org/xa-my-aes.zip>

There’s not any known incompatibility between fVDI and AES 4.1.

Please let us know about your experience."

Philipp replies:

"I know [about the disk image]. I was booting TOS 4.04 from a floppy image, loading BetaDOS and the host filesystem driver from there and then doing most of the rest via the host filesystem. It works, even though it’s a bit of a hack.

OK. Your configuration will actually load AES 4.1. However, with a plain disk image containing only MultiTOS and fVDI I get hangs, too. I guess it has something to do with the MiNT version. I’ll tinker around a little bit and see how it goes, maybe I can isolate the problem."

’STanda’ adds:

"The TOS 4.04 loaded by aranym is patched before used in ARAnyM for 68040 compatibility and more. I am not sure that the AES 4.1 as distributed with MultiTOS is 040 safe - most probably it is not.

In case you would like to run nostalgic apps I would recommend trying Hatari instead as that one is under way to get full cycle accurate Falcon emulation http://hatari.sf.net ."

Bill Glaholt asks about sourcecode for a Ramdisk:

"This is going to sound quite odd and weird, but I’m looking for the source code for any Atari ST ramdisk utility. I don’t care

which one, how good it is/was, or whatever. I just wand the code for a ram disk (Atari ST).

Actually, more specifically, I would like any code, documentation, or reference that allows me to register a disk/hard/ram drive (and a library to access said drive)."

Miro Kropacek tells Bill:

"I think the best solution is to look in FreeMiNT sources -- it implements /ram (or so) device which is dynamically sized ramdisk drive..."

George Nakos jumps in and asks:

"MiNT???????? Why go to such extremes?

I would rather recommend VDISK which is freeware with source included. You can get it with the very good Turbo Assembler. Leech from http://dhs.nu/files_code.php"

Adam Klobukowski asks for help with setting the jumpers on his new CrazyDots video card:

"I've recently bought Crazy Dots VME card, but without any documentation. There are a lot of jumpers on card. Can someone enlighten me about what can I setup with them?"

Lonny Pursell tells Adam:

"I have both the German and English manuals. It says this:

<start quote>
1.8: Video Card Jumpers

A row of jumpers is installed on the card. The are meant to be changed only when you install an crazy dots expansion.

Note: Never modify these jumpers on your own, without having been explicitly told to do so. This could lead to the physical destruction of the card.
</end quote>

That's all says."

Adam now asks:

"What about J5 jumper near VME connector?"

Martin Byttebier tells Adam:

"I can't find any reference on the Crazy Dots Manual I have about J5 but there is a picture in the leaflet. I've make a scan of it which you download from this address:

<URL:http://users.telenet.be/tos4ever/downloads/crazy_dots-jumper.gif>
It’s a 1.1 MB file.

If you like I can scan the whole German manual for you."

Lonny comes back and adds:

"I’ve been through the entire English one now, and no mention of it either."

Jerome Mathevet posts this about a floppy drive replacement:

"Today, I came across a hardware mod to replace the floppy disc from the Atari ST or an Amiga.

It’s not for the casual soldering-iron wielder, though, and it would be more practical to be able to just plug a USB flash disk. Still, it’s impressive.

http://jeanfrancoisdelnero.free.fr/floppy_drive_emulator/index.html "

Well folks, that’s it for this time around. I hope that there are enough messages for a column next week. So Fates willing, we’ll meet again next week, right here. Tune in then and make sure you’re ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week’s Gaming Section - Video Games, Blessing or Curse?
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Sony Unveils PS3 Details!
  ’Bully’ Is No Columbine!
  And much more!

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->A-ONE’s Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Sony Unveils PlayStation 3 Details

Sony Computer Entertainment has announced a list of video game titles and provided new details about its online strategy for the PlayStation 3 console, which is expected to hit retail locations on November 17.

The gaming console will come in two versions, priced at $499 and $599, both with a drive that can play Blu-Ray discs.

More than 20 games will be available when the console ships, including selections from Electronic Arts and Activision, the two largest game publishers.

Sony noted that the two companies are currently developing over 50 more titles that will be rolled out in the coming months.

Online play will be possible through the PlayStation Network, which will let gamers compete against others as well as purchase games online. The network is expected to parallel Microsoft's offering for the Xbox 360, called Xbox Live.

Although Sony has been touting the virtues of its online game features, there could be difficulty in actually getting enough PlayStation 3 consoles onto the market.

The company noted that it might not reach this year's shipment target for the console and that its standalone Blu-ray player could be delayed.

Sony had planned to ship at least two million PlayStation 3s this year to the U.S. and Japan, and four million more to the rest of the world by March. In contrast, Nintendo is planning on shipment of at least four million Wii consoles by the end of the year.

The price and the limited availability of the PlayStation 3 are likely to make it attractive to a smaller number of buyers, said Forrester Research analyst Paul Jackson. Both factors have the same root cause, he added, which is the inclusion of high-end components in the consoles.

Nintendo and Microsoft have built their gaming systems primarily using readily-available parts that can be churned out quickly. But because Sony decided to give its PS3 Blu-ray capability, it already naturally limited the number of units that could be made, Jackson noted.

"The other makers have focused more on getting the maximum number of units into the marketplace as the holiday buying season comes," he said. "But Sony has gone the other direction, preferring to be more cutting-edge and developing a complex, next-generation product."

Sony's PlayStation 3 might appeal to those gadget lovers who want the best possible system in terms of capability and processing, but, come holiday time, it is likely that Sony could get trumped by the Xbox 360 and Wii, said Jackson. On the other hand, Sony might be able to triumph down the line, thanks to consumer loyalty. The company recently announced that for the seventh year in a
row, it has been named the number-one brand in the annual Harris Poll survey of consumer brand names, beating out names like Coca-Cola and Dell.

Video Games: Blessing Or Curse?

Scary monster or superhero?

A major new exhibition at London's Science Museum on Friday pondered the

history of video games - is the world’s fastest growing entertainment industry a blessing or a curse?

And while adults weighed up the pro’s and con’s of the console revolution, kids were let loose on 120 games from Pac-Man to PlayStation.

The thought-provoking exhibition offers no easy answers on the gaming industry whose estimated annual $25 billion turnover exceeds Hollywood revenues and now even boasts its own World Cyber Games.

But the arguments are cogently laid out in a string of information panels interlaced with the gaming consoles.

It cited a New York study which showed that nimble-fingered surgeons who played video games were 30 percent more accurate and faster than their non-gaming colleagues. Video games are now used in training Air Force pilots.

Californian researchers have developed a game for kids with cancer that has a nano-robotic heroine called Roxxi who seeks out and destroys malignant cells. But, on the other side of the coin, British kids, for example, now spend an estimated two months of the year staring at a screen in a country where child obesity and lack of exercise is a major health concern.

And Amsterdam has a clinic for video game addicts - an eight-week gaming detox which offers group therapy and counseling.

"We want people to make up their own minds," said the exhibition’s events coordinator Gaetan Lee.

"Are we creating a nation of couch potatoes? What are their psychological effects? Do the games make us more violent? It is all up for debate," he told Reuters at the "Game On" exhibition’s press launch.

"Of course there are geeks out there but now technology is allowing more people to access them (games)," said Lee, a devoted computer fan who spends up to seven hours a week at the console.

"My favorite at the moment is a surgery game where you can wield the knife," he said.

But gone are the days when games were the passion of moody teenagers in darkened bedrooms. The average age of today’s player is 33 and the industry is working on brainteaser games to appeal to "grey players."

As adults at the exhibition contemplated the way forward for the industry, children busily reached for the controls.

Eight-year-old Daisy Chamberlain was happily engrossed in a game of Pac-Man, indifferent to its lack of sophistication in today’s computer world of space age graphics.

"They are great. It is easy to play but fun. I like the old games just as much as the new," she said.

Ubisoft, one of the world’s largest video game publishers, announced that Tom Clancy’s Splinter Cell Double Agent is now available for the Xbox 360 video game and entertainment system from Microsoft for a suggested retail price of $59.99. Tom Clancy’s Splinter Cell Double Agent Limited Collector s Edition is also available while supplies last for a suggested retail price $69.99.

"Tom Clancy s Splinter Cell Double Agent is Ubisoft s next blockbuster, setting the tone for what we expect to be a very successful holiday season," said Tony Key, vice president of marketing at Ubisoft. "We are positive that this next chapter of the Splinter Cell franchise will deliver an impressively unique gaming experience that will elevate the brand to new heights by evoking players emotions."

In the highly anticipated sequel to the 2005 game of the year, Tom Clancy s Splinter Cell Double Agent, play as a double agent spy for the first time ever. Take on dual roles of covert operative and ruthless terrorist, where your choices of whom to betray and whom to protect actually affect the outcome of your game.

Experience the relentless tension and gut-wrenching dilemmas of life as a double agent. Lie. Kill. Sabotage. Betray. All to protect the innocent. How far will you go to gain the enemy s trust? As covert operative Sam Fisher, you must infiltrate a vicious terrorist group and destroy it from within. You ll need to carefully weigh the consequences of your actions. Kill too many terrorists and you ll blow your cover. Hesitate and millions will die. Do whatever it takes to complete your mission, but get out alive.

Features Include:

* Double agent gameplay and branching storyline: Play both sides and decide between opposing NSA and terrorists objectives. You choose whose priorities to support, and whose to undermine. Your actions affect the story and gameplay, leading to shockingly different endings.

* Gadgets and weapons: As you progress, get access to prototype upgraded gadgets and prototype weapons, like improved night vision, based on your choices and covert skills.

* Authentic double agent tactics: Use realistic tactics, based on testimonies of actual undercover agents, to sabotage the enemies plans.

* Don t blow your cover: Steal, destroy, kill, and evade the authorities. Do whatever it takes to make your mark and gain their trust.

* A world of international espionage: Go from Shanghai and Cozumel to America itself, where New York City and Los Angeles are threatened by the terrorists agenda of destruction.

* All-new extreme gameplay situations: Conduct your missions underwater amid churning ice floes, in a blinding sandstorm, or even sheathed in dust and smoke.

* Innovative multiplayer: The critically acclaimed multiplayer mode is back with new innovations and exclusives for each platform. Get recruited and earn rank upgrades, and sabotage or spy for your team

Bully Is A Far Cry From Columbine

If you believe the hype, the new video game Bully is the most corrupting thing to happen to teenagers since Elvis Presley gyrated his hips on "The Ed Sullivan Show." Critics have been crusading against the game on the talk show circuit for months, with one activist calling it a "Columbine simulator" as he filed legal arguments attempting to remove it from shelves.

That accusation would only be true if the Trench Coat Mafia's weapons of choice were itching powder and wedgies. In reality, the well-designed PlayStation 2 title from Rockstar Games is closer to a video game version of the movie "My Bodyguard," with fewer killings (none) than the typical episode of "Murder, She Wrote."

While it has many structural similarities to Rockstar's most notorious title, Bully is, at worst, Grand Theft Auto with misdemeanors. And it exposes the ridiculousness in much of the hysteria surrounding video games, which keep pulling a bigger share of the entertainment dollar but are still misunderstood by a large segment of the public and the media.

Pundits who focus on violence in video games are missing an even bigger story: Most games in the 21st century aren't very good. As the production cost for each game grows higher with higher-powered consoles including the Xbox 360, developers are taking fewer chances, and the result is more imagination-stifling sequels and imitations. Rockstar may be perceived as the Terrell Owens of video game makers, but from an artistic standpoint, it's one of the few companies that has consistently been part of the solution - trying to innovate when others are settling for more of the same.

Bully has no shortage of creative energy, offering an immersive boarding school experience that is imaginative, funny and filled with surprises. You play tough kid Jimmy Hopkins, who enters Bullworth Academy as a last resort after numerous expulsions from better places. Bullworth turns out to be a totalitarian state, where the jocks, bullies and teachers rule with no mercy, and the nerds live in fear. Will Jimmy emerge as their leader and hero?

The tone seems equally influenced by "The Breakfast Club," "The Outsiders" and "The Karate Kid" - with an episode or two of "South Park" thrown in to keep you laughing.

For the first three hours of game play, almost nothing critical happens. You might attend a few classes, skip a few others and get used to the social ecosystem at the school, where just about everyone bigger than you seems to have a mean streak. After a showdown with Bullworth's biggest bully, you start to roam away from the school, and townies become an additional problem. Structurally, Bully has a free-roaming vibe that plays a lot like Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas, with much less territory but way more detail. While most buildings are impenetrable boxes in GTA, it seems like almost every structure in Bully can be explored at some point.

Bully's central plot is fairly routine, but the individual missions and characters are a lot of fun. Your roommate Gary is off his meds, and his choice of a Halloween costume - a Nazi SS officer - foreshadows psychotic behavior to come. Jimmy learns many of his fighting moves from a local hobo who's a Korea vet, and while the hand-to-hand combat and dark humor more than earn the game a Teen rating (the approximate equivalent of a PG-13 movie), there's an underlying morality that is pervasive throughout

the game.

"Have you got any liquor," the hobo asks, the first time Jimmy runs into him.

"No," Jimmy responds. "I’m 15."

There is no blood in Bully, and the most menacing weapon I could get my hands on was a baseball bat. Jimmy can’t kill people, and there was less sex talk during the eight hours that I played than the typical 22-minute episode of "The Golden Girls." The biggest knock against Bully is the constant fistfights. (At approximately the halfway point, I had engaged in more than 400.) But the writers are pretty careful to make sure that almost everyone who gets a beat down pretty much deserves it.

The furor that surrounded Bully in recent months highlights the stupidity of trying to ban a game that no one has actually seen. Without ever having played Bully, activist lawyer Jack Thompson labeled it "the violent Columbine simulator video game" and spent much of the last year trying - and failing - to keep the game from store shelves.

(Critics were more successful in Europe. PC World in the United Kingdom has decided not to sell the game, although through a gaping hole in logic, that chain is still stocking the Mature-rated Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas.)

Misinformation such as the Bully scandal just hurts parents’ chances of communicating with their children about video games. Every time kids see adults going berserk about a game that turns out to be relatively benign, there’s little choice but to assume they’re not ready for an honest conversation. Bully critics are using the same arguments we heard during censorship battles that focused on comic books in the 1950s, rock music in the 1960s and Dungeons & Dragons in the 1980s. (Remember when that was corrupting our children?) Except this time, we have cable television talk shows and the Internet to spread misinformation and stir outrage.

Even if you agree that video games are too violent, focusing energy on Bully is like trying to raid a crack house and accidentally smashing in the door of the doughnut franchise across the street. Bully may have been the game CNN’s Lou Dobbs was getting apoplectic about, but I can name 50 other titles released this year that featured far more gratuitous blood and mayhem.

But now that the game has finally been released, there are some signs that lessons are being learned. Bay Area viewers watching CBS 5-TV this weekend may have seen Jim Steyer, founder of the local child advocacy group Common Sense Media, acknowledging the violent aspects of the game while suggesting that parents decide for themselves whether Bully is appropriate for their teens.

And in the United States, legal attempts to restrict the game have once again failed.

"There’s a lot of violence. A whole lot," Miami-Dade County Judge Ronald Friedman ruled in court earlier this month, according to a Miami Herald article. "(But) less than we see on television every night."

AARP gathering in Anaheim for "people 50-plus" includes health tips, but ventures far beyond.

Elton John, Bill Cosby, the Pillsbury Doughboy and a NASCAR driving simulator are among the highlights at this year’s AARP convention and expo, rolling into the Anaheim Convention Center today.

About 25,000 graying baby boomers and other vintage humans are expected at the three-day event, which offers a curious blend of clinging to youth and preparing for death.

Roaming the cavernous exhibit hall, conventioneers can alternately play Nintendo or plan their funerals, buy motorcycle insurance or soothe cracked cuticles, discuss space exploration with NASA or talk about enlarged prostates with the American Urological Assn.

Electric scooter and wheelchair rentals will be available, but that doesn’t mean this is the stereotypical dentures-and-Metamucil crowd. Nearly half of the attendees will be younger than 60, according to AARP officials, and most of the rest will be under 70.

"Please do not use words like ’old,’ ’seniors’ or ’retired,’ " cautions a handbook for convention volunteers. The preferred term is people 50-plus.

In recent years, AARP, which is open to anyone over age 50, has aggressively courted baby boomers. The group has retooled its magazine and conventions to cater to boomer sensibilities.

At the 2004 expo in Las Vegas, the lineup included singer James Taylor, sex therapist Dr. Ruth Westheimer and a seminar on "The History of Beer." There was also a giant fake colon next to an Elvis impersonator.

This year, former CBS news anchor Dan Rather kicks off the festivities, followed by a smorgasbord of product demonstrations, seminars, concerts, fitness workouts, movie screenings, tourist excursions and dancing.

"Come and get your groove on and prepare to cut a rug," urges one brochure. "You will feel like you are in funkytown, ’cause you gotta keep on dancing as you do the bump and the hustle!"

The roster of speakers includes comedian Carl Reiner, actor Raquel Welch, author Maya Angelou, NFL veteran Terry Bradshaw, "Dilbert" cartoonist Scott Adams, Tae Bo creator Billy Blanks and former "Sesame Street" star Sonia Manzano.

Between speeches and seminars, conventioneers can play simulated golf, join the Peace Corps, wander through wheelchair-friendly houses, see a live alligator, tour a $555,000 motor home with its own fireplace and learn about lighthouses at the event’s 430 exhibitor booths.

The chance to reach aging baby boomers has attracted some strange bedfellows to the event. On the convention floor, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals will compete for attention with Dicker and Dicker furs. Anheuser-Busch will square off against Alcoholics Anonymous.

Another quirky entry is Nintendo. A news release issued by the electronic game maker said, "Nintendo at AARP Convention in Anaheim - THIS IS NOT A TYPO."

The expo is AARP’s first gathering in two years. The group’s 2005 convention, scheduled to be held in New Orleans, was canceled because of Hurricane Katrina. Admission is $15 for AARP members, $27.50 for nonmembers or $5 for just the exhibit hall. The Cosby and Elton John concerts are sold out.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online - Online Users Growl & Purr!
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Atari Jaguar Europe Festival 2006

The Atari Jaguar Europe Festival, short "e-jagfest" will take place on 4th november in Kaarst, Germany.

It s a show for all video game fans of europe, center of interest is Atari and their systems, especially Jaguar and Lynx. Of course other systems are welcome as well, for example NUON and other exotic systems were a common seen guest.

Playing games is just one part of the event. Homebrew developers from different countries also take the chance to present and sometimes even offer their exclusive releases for sale.

Last year there was an limited e-jagfest edition of Starcat s "Jag Mind:Bomb Squad" for example. This year a new release was annouced to be offered for sale. You will also hear the latest news about the upcoming Jaguar adventure game "Eerievale" as well as two new VCS 2600 games called "Raster Fahndung" and "Encaved". Matthias Domin will be showing two projects as well. It will be an exciting time for sure.

There will also be a Battlesphere network as well as popular lynx network sessions such as Checkered Flag and of course it s a must for every event to enjoy little fun competitions of games such as Club Drive or Kasumi Ninja. It s guaranteed to create a great, fun atmosphere.

In the last years there have always been retrailers on the event, this year Nick Harlow of 16/32 Systems couldn t promise to attend due to health reasons. But maybe he will surprise us :-) The Starcat Developments releases will be available for sure. If you want to pick up a game, make sure you contact Starcat before, so he can bring enough units.

It will be a great time for sure, that s something all e-jagfests had in common, as all visitors will gladly tell you. If you are a gamer or developer, even if you don t play atari games, you are welcome to attend and bring along your favorite system, or just drop by and join the fun bare handed. There is enough time to check out games and play at the many installed systems.

The event has reached ist 6th anniversary and takes place for the 3rd time in a row in Kaarst, Germany.

Beginning time is on 4th november at 10:30 in the morning. Entrace fee is 5 euro.

Additional information can be found on the website: www.e-jagfest.de

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Starcat Developments
http://www.starcat-dev.de

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

The Return of the Web Browser Wars

Last week, Microsoft released the much-awaited version 7 its Internet Explorer Web browser. Tomorrow, the Mozilla Foundation will release the final version of Firefox 2.0, the latest iteration of the open-source browser that has been nipping steadily at Microsoft's heels.

And don't forget Opera, which, according to some, has more features and renders Web pages much more quickly than other browsers. Version 9 of Opera was released in July, in a prelude to this week's prize fight between Microsoft and Mozilla. But if the browser battles are back in full swing, which one is winning the war?

According to analytics firm OneStat, Microsoft owns a crushing 86 percent of the global market and Firefox has just over 11 percent. Opera weighs in with less than 1 percent.

But data from companies such as Net Applications, which keeps tabs on the browser market, shows that Firefox has been adding market share for months. And W3Schools.com, a Web site that caters to early adopters, Web designers, and other technical experts, reports that Firefox accounts for nearly a third of its traffic.

Carmi Levy, senior analyst with the Info-Tech Research Group, said that Internet Explorer 7 "puts Microsoft back into the features game."

The new version of Internet Explorer boasts tabbed browsing, built-in antiphishing protection, a new print-preview feature that lets you fit a Web page onto a single sheet of paper, and one-click erasure of your browsing history.

Not to be outdone, the new version of Firefox has tabbed browsing and enhanced security. It also auto-suggests search terms and maintains the features in prior versions that made it a favorite with Internet aficionados, such as extensions, or add-on programs, that let you do everything from synchronizing bookmarks to viewing weather reports.

Opera, which has the smallest market share, might have the largest feature set. Version 9 boasts a tabbed interface, but it also offers a transfer manager for large downloads, a customizable content blocker for keeping ads and pop-ups in check, and a "mouse gestures" feature to give the mouse a little more power. Opera 9 also offers voice control, skins, built-in support for BitTorrent, and a kiosk mode. And it offers integrated one-click widget downloads.

"Competition in the browser space is always a good thing," said Info-Tech's Levy. Microsoft let five years pass before releasing a new browser, because the company followed what the market told it to do, he said. "And in this case, the market was not telling Microsoft it needed a better browser."

But the entrance of Firefox a couple years ago changed that, Levy went on to say, forcing Redmond to up the ante in browser features and give consumers more options.

Levy also pointed out that Microsoft still has an edge in the corporate sphere. Even though other browsers cost nothing to download, he explained, the cost of fielding support calls on large-scale deployments could make Firefox, Opera, and other minor browsers too much of a hassle for corporate I.T. departments.

So now that Microsoft, Mozilla, and Opera have unleashed the dogs of war, all that remains to be seen is which browser takes the biggest bite.

Microsoft To Start Vista Coupon Plan For PC Buyers

Microsoft Corp. this week will begin a coupon program for personal computer buyers to upgrade to the new Vista operating system when it premiers next year in an effort to avoid a drop-off in PC sales over the holidays and ahead of the software's release.

Microsoft said on Tuesday the upgrade program will begin on October 26 for its much-anticipated Windows Vista operating system and Office 2007 software suite. The program allows customers who buy a PC running Windows XP to still be able to upgrade to Windows Vista when the new operating system becomes available in early 2007. A similar program is in place for Office 2007, also due out early next year to consumers.

Most large PC manufacturers, including industry leaders Hewlett-Packard Co. and Dell Inc. will participate in the upgrade program, although upgrade offers may vary depending on the company.

The Windows Vista upgrade may be free or sold at a discount depending on the manufacturer, Microsoft added.

"There is no objections for why you'd want to buy a PC this holiday season, because you know you can get the upgrade," said Brad Brooks, general manager of Windows product marketing.

Vista is Microsoft's first major upgrade in five years for Windows, which sits on more than 90 percent of the world's personal computers. In the first year of release, Vista will be installed on more than 100 million computers worldwide, according to research firm IDC.

Microsoft’s Brooks estimated that between 80 percent and 85 percent of PCs sold during this holiday season will be eligible for the upgrade program.

Consumers who buy a Windows XP computer at a major retailer or directly from a large manufacturer will see a designation that the PC is "Windows Vista Capable" and then receive a coupon for an upgrade.

After Windows Vista is released, the customer will be shipped a DVD carrying the new operating system.

The Windows and Office business together account for more than half of Microsoft’s total revenue and nearly all of its operating profit. The new Windows and Office is scheduled to be released to corporate customers before the

year-end.

The program will run until March 15.

Oracle Offers Half-price Support for Red Hat Linux

Oracle Corp. is taking aim at Red Hat Inc., the top distributor of Linux operating system software, with an offer to provide half-price technical support to Red Hat Linux users.

Speaking at the company’s annual user conference on Wednesday, Chairman and Chief Executive Larry Ellison said Oracle was seeking to solve key problems that have held back the development of Linux among big corporate customers.

"Oracle is announcing full support for Red Hat Linux," Ellison told the OracleWorld conference in San Francisco. "The goal is to enhance and speed the adoption of Linux."

"Our support costs less than half what Red Hat charges," he added.

Linux is the most-popular variant of open-source software, which allows developers to share code in order to focus on creating new features themselves. Software like Linux allows customers to use programs for free, paying only for custom features, maintenance and technical support.

Red Hat shares fell nearly 11 percent to $17.40 in extended trade from a Nasdaq close of $19.51 following Ellison’s announcement. Oracle shares rose slightly to $18.71 in extended trade from a regular-session closing price of $18.62.

"What happens to Red Hat? Is killing them an unintended consequence?" one audience member asked Ellison during a question-and-answer session following his announcement.

"This is capitalism, we are competing. We are trying to offer a better product at a lower price," said Ellison, the technology industry’s most outspoken executive, adding that Red Hat may choose to cut its prices too.

Ellison said Oracle was targeting corporate customers who rely on Red Hat Linux as the operating system to run their core business applications, but choose to pay Oracle to provide Linux technical support and maintenance.

Responding to a principal concern among big businesses, Oracle will fix

bugs in current and prior versions of Red Hat Linux software, providing similar levels of technical support as it now offers on Oracle databases and applications.

"There is no true enterprise support" for Linux, Ellison said, using industry jargon for technical support contracts for big business enterprises. "We would like to fix that."

Another concern among corporate customers is the threat of patent suits by software makers against customers, but Ellison said Oracle would assume legal responsibility to assure them.

"This uncertainty about intellectual property is also slowing (Linux) adoption among our large customers," he said.

In Limbo, Bidders Asked, 'How Low Can You Go?'

Going once, going twice ... sold to the lowest bidder.

That's the premise behind an upside-down auction game aimed to give marketers a place to interact with consumers and build buzz about their brands.

Developed by start-up Limbo 41414, the online and cellphone auction rewards the lowest bid with a catch: The winner is the person with the lowest bid that no one else also bids. If two people bid a penny, they both lose.

Limbo, launched in January with $9 million in venture capital, aims to profit mostly by selling sponsorship rights to the auctions. To get things going it has bought some prizes, from iPods (one went for $4.30) to a Mini Cooper ($50.43). But the goal is for marketers to provide products they want to promote, as well as pay a fee to feature them in auctions, says co-founder and CEO Jonathon Linner.

In exchange, the auctions offer interactivity between the consumer/player and the brand - "engagement," in ad industry-speak. That's the hot trend in promotions today, and marketers signing up with Limbo so far include Virgin Group, Lifetime Television, Procter & Gamble, Glam.com and Electronic Arts. "We've built an experience where a consumer can have fun with the brand," Linner says. "It's not advertising in the traditional form, but it has the desired effect of advertising."

Users can view auctions at 41414.com. They can also bid there, but most bid via cellphone text message. Throughout the auctions, which range from a day to a month or more, Limbo sends text messages to players updating them on the bidding, such as: "Bummer! Someone got here first - there are already 3 bids of 76c" or "The lowest unique bid is higher than 160c."

Limbo won't disclose online traffic, but says it's received more than 4 million unique text messages. (It also promises it won't sell cellphone numbers or e-mail addresses to third-party marketers.) Web tracker ComScore Networks says 41414.com had 244,000 unique visitors in September, up 37% from May. Close to half of those users were ages 18 to 34, ComScore says. (Participants must be at least 18.)

"It's an intriguing business model," says JupiterResearch's research director,

Joe Laszlo, who says text-message bidding also makes the auctions more likely to draw young adults. "That's an attractive group for marketers these days, and it's one that marketers are having a tougher time finding through traditional means such as television."

Limbo's more than 250 auctions have awarded about $360,000 in prizes for bids totaling less than $1,000. The company provided about half of those prizes, but Linner says interest is growing from marketers who want to promote products in non-traditional ways.

"A lot of consumers - especially young consumers - don't want ads pushed at them," he says. "They want to be in control. We built an experience where a consumer can have fun with the brand."

Among marketers in the game:

*Electronic Arts, which is rolling out Need for Speed: Carbon, will begin to auction at the end of this month a $50,000 red Porsche Cayman to promote the latest edition in the fast car-based video game series. Need for Speed "is one of our most important franchises," says Brandon Barber, EA director of entertainment marketing. "We really wanted to do something new. ... This is a different way to create something fun for our (video gamer) community."

*Lifetime Television has partnered with Limbo to offer several prize packages, including a $5,000 vacation that went for $1.80. (While Lifetime paid for those prizes, Limbo also runs games for media companies in exchange for promotion on their properties.)

*In auctions this summer, P&G contributed two $200 bags of Max Factor make-up brushes. Each was paired with a $1,000 shopping spree from cosmetics and fashion website Glam.com. One went for $5.36, the other for $3.07. More than 250,000 people participated in the two auctions.

While the bulk of the auctions are free, the site also is hosting some text message-only games - to raise money for causes - in which players have to pay to play. Virgin set up three auctions at 99-cents-per-bid (after two free bids) to raise money for its Virgin Unite charity. Two, now ended, offered Harley-Davidson motorcycles. The first, a $15,000 2007 VRSCD Night Rod, was won by Mary Winegarner, 58, of San Jose, Calif., for $7.35. The second auction ended Friday, and the winner has yet to be verified. Still up for bid is a week's vacation at Necker Island, a Caribbean island owned by Virgin Group Chairman Richard Branson.

While most games are free, text-message bidders still have to pay whatever messaging charges their cellphone plan entails.

To make sure those charges don't get out of control, Limbo limits daily bids. The caps, from 10 to 30 depending on the game, were added after one guy "placed 1,600 bids in six hours," Linner says. "We don't want people to get burnt out. And we want to make sure they're texting responsibly, based on their text-messaging plans."

JupiterResearch's Laszlo says he can see how the drive for deals can become addictive. "I have to say, I've avoided becoming a player because I think I'd get hooked on it and blow my cellphone text-messaging budget out of the water."

Yahoo Makes Internet Bookmarks Ready To Share

Bookmarks have become the cluttered closets of Web surfers. Internet media company Yahoo Inc. is looking to give users an easier way to organize, search for and share favorite sites or Web pages, the company said on Tuesday.

It is also introducing a simplified version of the Yahoo toolbar that features a one-click way to bookmark Web pages. The toolbar is a menu of key Yahoo services that is embedded along the top border of Web browser software programs.

The moves are part of a careful, go-slow plan by Yahoo to convince millions more of its users to embrace the new generation of Web surfing tools that allow consumers to share what they learn with friends or colleagues.

These technologies are known as collaborative filtering or social media. Yet, while popular among tech-savvy users, the vast majority of casual Web users still find such technologies confusing to use.

"We expect that, over time, users will start sharing bookmarks more readily," said Tomi Poutanen, product manager of Yahoo’s social search business. "There is a lot more that can be done around bookmarks than what is (now) done," he said.

Bookmarks, also known as favorites, are the main way Web users remember interesting sites to return to later. They are a basic feature of browser software. The big drawback is most users have no idea how to save bookmarks when they switch computers or browsers, nor how to share bookmarks with friends.

Yahoo already offers several alternatives. Yahoo Bookmarks, a kind of personal online storage locker, gives individuals access to favorite sites from any Web-connected computers.

Del.icio.us was acquired by Yahoo in late 2005 and attracts a devoted crowd of sophisticated Internet users. But it is a tough sell to mainstream audiences. It’s grown from 300,000 users late last year to more than 1 million. By contrast, Yahoo Bookmarks service for individual users has 20 million users. The new version of Yahoo Bookmarks at http://new.bookmarks.yahoo.com, offers several improvements on organizing bookmarks into folders to make them easier to find. But it also encourages users to try "tagging," a more modern way of organizing information that relies on users assigning keywords to personally important information to make it easier to search for and find such information again later.

Yahoo Bookmarks also introduces the concept of social bookmarks by allowing users to send favorite links to friends via built-in e-mail or instant message links. It gives more visual clues than does Del.icio.us to help users learn how to "tag," or identify favorite sites. "It provides a way for people to become more comfortable with tagging," Poutanen said.

This is the middle ground that Yahoo finds itself in as it encourages people to embrace the emerging social Web era, said Gartner technology analyst Mike McGuire. "Yahoo is trying to create a transition path for its mainstream users," he said.

Yahoo officials are happy to describe the new technology as transitional - a compromise between the clunky convenience of older bookmark services and the new world of shared bookmarks that have many advantages that leave most

users confused.

Call it Web 1.5 - half way between the static Web pages and so-called Web 2.0, the new generation of Internet technology that encourages users to interact through browsers with other users to share what they know.

The new bookmark and toolbar products are available in the United States, Germany and Taiwan, with other countries to follow.

The new Yahoo toolbar allows users to create an unlimited number of personalized link buttons for fast access to favorite Web sites. Further details are at http://toolbar.yahoo.com/.

New Chip-Cooling Technology

IBM researchers have found a way to draw twice as much heat off of hard-working computer chips, clearing the way for server farms and data centers to use denser, faster processors.

The researchers discovered a better way to squeeze thermally conductive paste between hot chips and their heat sinks, the company announced Thursday at the BroadGroup Power and Cooling Summit in London.

Inspired by the natural branching patterns of tree roots and human veins, the IBM group discovered they could move a large volume of paste with very little energy, avoiding the danger of damaging or cracking chips as they expand at high temperatures.

This advance will allow engineers to design more powerful chips and continue to follow the Moore’s Law trend of shrinking transistors to ever-smaller sizes, said Bruno Michel, manager of the advanced thermal packaging research group at IBM’s Zurich Research Laboratory.

As chips become more dense, they are increasingly constrained by their own heat, with modern processors using up to 100 watts per square centimeter. That is already pushing the upper limit of current cooling technology, which relies on fans to blow air over heat sinks. Some large server farms need so many fans that IT managers spend as much money to cool the chips as they do to run them. Because of that budget paradox, many computer vendors have found that cooling systems have changed from mere technical detail into great marketing pitch.

When it launched a range of blade and rack servers in August, IBM gave equal billing to their fast chips and their new cooling technique. The "Cool Blue" feature sucks heat out of racked servers by running liquid through the enclosure doors.

Likewise, Dell founder Michael Dell boasted at a trade show on Monday that his company’s latest desktops and servers would use less electricity - and produce less heat - thanks to more efficient processors. Chip manufacturers claiming to make those more efficient, cooler processors include Advanced Micro Devices with its "Rev F" Opteron, Intel with its "Woodcrest" Xeon 5100 and future "Clovertown" quad-core Xeon and Sun Microsystems with its UltraSparc T1.

But future chips will get even hotter, so the IBM researchers have already begun testing an even better approach, cooling chips by spraying them with

water instead of air. This "direct jet impingement" method uses an array of 50,000 tiny nozzles circulating water in a closed loop, protecting the delicate chips circuits from getting wet. In early results, the system has absorbed the power of 370 watts per square centimeter, about four to six times better than current air cooling methods.

Veeker Gets Mobile Video Uploaded To Web

A one-year-old San Francisco startup on Wednesday launched its flagship service that lets consumers upload pictures to the Internet from their mobile phone. Veeker built a photo sharing service with technology it gained in August when acquiring ThumbJive that lets consumers upload still pictures or video to its Web site from any camera phone. It was announced at Digital Hollywood Fall in Santa Monica, Calif.

"It took us about nine months to develop the technology," said Veeker Co-founder Rodger Raderman. "Along with the ThumbJive acquisition, we managed to retain four very experienced developers in the U.S. and another eight-person team in China."

They built the service on a Java platform. There’s no client application to download to the phone, nor data plan required from the cellular provider. And the still pictures or videos appear at Veeker.com within seconds. Consumers can set privacy options that allows only their friends to view the content.

Research firm Telephia estimates more than 8 million U.S. consumers use their mobile phones to shoot video.

Judge Denies Demand To Shut Down Spamhaus

A federal judge has rejected an e-mail marketing company’s request that the Internet domain assigned to Spamhaus, a non-profit organization based in the U.K., be suspended, giving the anti-spam group’s blacklist a reprieve and avoiding a clash over U.S. rulings against the Internet.

U.S. District Court Judge Charles Kocoras denied the proposed motion from e360Insight, an Illinois-based company that sued Spamhaus for adding its domain to the blacklist, a database of spammers and suspected spammers that is widely used by spam filtering services and software. Spamhaus did not contest the case, claiming that the U.S. court had no jurisdiction.

With Spamhaus not participating, Kocoras last month was forced to rule for e360Insight, which was granted an $11.7 million judgment. Spamhaus, however, stuck by its contention that e360Insight was a known and egregious spammer, and refused to pay the fine, issue an apology, or remove e360Insight from the blacklist.

This month, e360Insight demanded that Kocoras order the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) and Tucows, a domain registrar, to strip Spamhaus of its domain name for not complying with the judgment. Thursday, the judge refused the motion, saying it was too broad and would eliminate all traffic, not just that claimed by the original lawsuit, to spamhaus.org.

"This relief is still too broad to be warranted in this case," wrote Kocoras in his rejection. "While we will not condone or tolerate noncompliance with a valid order of this court, neither will we impose a sanction that does not correspond to the gravity of the offending conduct."

The decision keeps the group's blacklist in operation, which drew reaction from David Linhardt, the chief executive of e360Insight. "If the court cannot prevent Spamhaus from violating its order, then Spamhaus will continue to censor and control the email messages Americans can receive," Linhardt wrote in a message posted on his company's Web site.

Spamhaus, which claims its blacklist blocks 50 billion spam messages a day sent to some 650 million different e-mail accounts, was unavailable for comment. Last week, messaging service and software analyst Richi Jennings of Ferris Research said that if Spamhaus and its blacklist were to "go dark," it might
fuel arguments by other countries and international organizations who want the U.S. to relinquish control of the Internet. Recent efforts along those lines have included proposals that the United Nations administer the Internet, and have grown out of frustration with some ICANN decisions, such as its May rejection of the .xxx top-level domain.

Judge Kocoras' order can be downloaded as a PDF file from the ICANN site.

Phishing Attack Targets MySpace Users

Reports today indicate that a MySpace user was e-mailing potential victims inviting them to visit a fraudulent log-in page, where they were asked to enter their e-mail address and password. That information was then sent to a server located in France, according to Netcraft, a Web analysis firm that reported the problem.

The attack, which was shut down by MySpace around 10 a.m. Pacific this morning took advantage of the way MySpace organizes URLs in order to give the fake log-in page a believable Web address, something that could confuse even security-conscious users, according to Netcraft analyst Rich Miller.

The attacker had registered a MySpace account named login_home_index_html, meaning that the MySpace page hosting the fake login, looked like a legitimate place where users would sign on to the service.

Users visitng the page would see a legitimate MySpace URL but would not necessarily realize that it was, in fact, a MySpace user page that had been configured to trick them into entering their passwords and e-mail addresses.

This type of attack is not unprecedented, but it does show, "one more interesting way that phishers are trying to trick people out of their account details," Miller said.

Typically, sites like MySpace have a database of user names that are off-limits, in order to prevent this type of attack, Miller said. "What this kind of attack suggests is that sites have to expand that list."

MySpace is owned by News Corp. A News Corp. spokeswoman said that users who are unsure about whether they're at the right log-in page should go

to the main address.

Blind Web Surfers Sue For Accessibility

"Links list dialogue." "Links list view." "Your Account - Two of 164." This is what the Internet sounds like to Chris Danielsen. Danielsen is blind. He’s using a software program called Jaws that converts the text on a Web page into a computerized voice that comes out through a speaker, allowing him to surf the Web using keyboard commands instead of a mouse - the same way lots of blind people use the Internet.

In this case, his computer is listing all the Web links on the page he’s on and telling him that the highlighted link his cursor is on now will take him to the "Your Account" section on Wal-Mart’s Web site.

Danielsen, who writes a blog called "The Voice of the Nation’s Blind" for the National Federation of the Blind, says accessing the Internet has been a "huge boon" for blind people. It’s allowed them to accomplish a great number of tasks on their own that would otherwise present difficulties or require the help of a sighted person, such as banking, buying plane tickets and shopping for things like groceries and music.

But like any evolving technology, accessing the Internet has hardly been a smooth ride for the blind. Some sites can be difficult to navigate, particularly if they contain relatively few text links and rely more on graphics and other visual elements that screen-reading software such as Jaws can’t interpret.

That’s why the NFB, an organization that represents blind people, is suing Target Corp., saying that its Web site is inaccessible to blind Internet users. Last month a federal judge in California allowed the NFB’s case to proceed, rejecting Target’s argument that its Web site wasn’t subject to the Americans With Disabilities Act, a 1990 law that requires retailers and other public places to make accommodations for people with disabilities. Target argued that the law only covered physical spaces.

The case, which is entering a pretrial phase called discovery in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California, could set an important precedent for applying federal accessibility law to the Internet.

Target said in a statement that its Web site was "committed to providing an online experience that is accessible to all of our guests. Despite the lawsuit brought forward by the National Federation of the Blind, we have always and will continue to implement new technologies to our Web site."

John Pare, a spokesman for the NFB, said most Web sites are far easier to navigate than Target’s. In a demonstration of screen-reading software for The Associated Press, Danielsen showed that many links on Target’s side were unintelligible to the Jaws software, and that the final purchase required the use of a mouse, something even the most sophisticated blind Web surfer would have trouble with. However, he was able to navigate other sites and purchased a CD from Amazon.

Jaws, made by Freedom Scientific, is a popular kind of screen-reading software, but there are others, including Window-Eyes, made by GW Micro, and Hal, made by Dolphin Computer Access.

Many Web sites already have made major progress in becoming accessible to the blind, and some, such as those run by the government, are required to do so by law.

Yet surfing the Internet is not always worry-free for the blind. Crista Earl, the head of Web operations for the American Foundation for the Blind in New York, said graphics that don't contain textual labels - which can be read by screen-reading software - are a common obstacle for blind Internet users, as are "forms" that are unlabeled. Forms are the little boxes where you insert data, such as a book title you wanted to search for.

The decision to hold Target's Web site to the same standards of accessibility as its physical store under the Americans with Disabilities Act was considered a victory by many advocates for the blind, but at the same time others worry that the ruling could be read too narrowly.

Not every business or Web site is subject to the Americans with Disabilities Act, said John D. Kemp., a lawyer with the Washington law firm Powers, Pyles, Sutter & Verville P.C. The ADA applies mainly to public places such as restaurants, retailers, movie theaters and health care institutions, explained Kemp, who has long worked on compliance issues related to disabilities, employment and technology.

For an electronic retailer such as Amazon.com, which has no physical store, the law is unclear, Kemp said. "There is no well defined policy in this area at all."

However, Kemp noted that many businesses, such as banks, see a strong business rationale for making their sites accessible, and have moved aggressively to do so.

Meanwhile, other retailers are also moving to adapt their Web sites to screen-reading software. Kelly Groehler, a spokeswoman for Best Buy Co., says the company has made a number of changes to its site since late last year, including incorporating "alt tags" - or text that labels items like graphics - into its site.

Best Buy also moved code for drop-down menus to the bottom of the page, where it's less likely to duplicate other elements on the page. "We're trying to be proactive here," Groehler said. Walmart.com spokeswoman Amy Colella says the site has made sure it is "reasonably accessible" to the blind.

Other retailers are making similar efforts, but it remains a challenge due to the continuing evolution in the technologies used by blind people to surf the Internet, says Scott Silverman, executive director of Shop.org, a division of the National Retail Federation for online retailers.

"As the retailers' Web sites continue to evolve to stay competitive in the marketplace, sometimes the technologies necessary to do that are a little bit ahead of where the screen-readers are," Silverman said. "It's a very fast-moving environment. Retailers want to serve all their customers, including blind people."

Internet search giant Google Inc. is getting into the act as well. In July it launched a project to identify and rank Web sites that offer significant accessibility to the blind. As more information and services migrate online, keeping access open to it is of paramount importance to advocates for the blind.

"The blind have more access to information than they ever had in history - but that’s only true to the extent that Web accessibility is maintained," Danielsen said. "The technology is out there, and we don’t need barriers to be put in our way. Give us a way in."

Cyberspace Playing Big Part In US Elections

Video websites and blogs have grown into a major force in the US election campaign, providing an unbridled and widely read counterpoint to the traditional media.

From online video hotspots such as YouTube to widely read blogs like the Daily Kos or RedState, the web is offering an uncensored view of candidates and is seen as a powerful tool that can influence public opinion and elections. "In many respects, bloggers are acting like print reporters and people who are taking videos are acting like TV reporters," Lee Rainie, director of the Pew Internet and American Life Project, a Washington think tank, told AFP. "The Internet is becoming another media actor in the political communications environment."

The impact of this new actor in the current election campaign has been demonstrated by a slew of videos showing embarrassing missteps by politicians. One of the more famous "gotcha" moments posted on YouTube involved George Allen, a Republican senator from Virginia who was caught on camera using the racial slur "macaca" in referring to an opponent’s campaign worker.

Allen saw a steep drop in his poll ratings after the video was posted on YouTube, which has more than 20 million visitors a month and which was recently purchased by Google for 1.65 billion dollars.

Another candidate who has felt the sting of YouTube is Conrad Burns, a 71-year-old Republican senator from Montana who was shown in a video dozing off at a hearing.

A separate video shows him joking about the legal status of the "nice little Guatemalan man" who works at his house and a third has him warning constituents about a faceless enemy terrorist who is a "taxi driver in the daytime but a killer at night".

Many of the embarrassing videos are posted by the campaigns of rival candidates or by anonymous people.

Blogs, or online journals, and political junkies have in turn been using the videos or any incident reported in the mainstream media as fodder in the campaign and to mobilize activists.

Candidates are also turning to social networking sites in the hope of garnering the votes of younger voters, a group notoriously difficult to engage in politics, and to text-messaging, Rainie said.

According to a survey released by the Pew think tank last month, on a typical day in August, 26 million Americans were using the Internet for news or information about politics and the November 7 elections.

The figure of 26 million is two-and-a-half times larger than the number of

people who used the Internet for political news during mid-term elections in 2002, Pew said.

Joe Trippi, who ran Democrat Howard Dean’s 2004 presidential campaign and pioneered use of the Internet to raise funds and rally voters, said he believes the Web will increasingly play a role in political campaigns, both in the United States and abroad.

"I have envy for the tools they have in this election," he told AFP. "I think the Internet is becoming much more powerful and clearly affecting many races around the country."

Rainie said although polls have shown that blogs and video online sites affect

public opinion, what is not clear is how this will translate at the polling booth on election day.

"We don’t know yet whether the change in opinion is momentary or whether it really creates a big problem for candidates," he said. "We won’t know until election day."

U.S. Students Make Politics A Fantasy Game

Politics has become a game for a group of California college students who have launched an online video game, "Fantasy Congress," in the lead-up to next month’s U.S. congressional elections.

The game, officially launched on Monday, is a new spin on the popular online fantasy sports games where players chose a team of real-life players and tally points based on their statistical performance.

In "Fantasy Congress," found at http://www.fantasycongress.us/fc/, a player drafts a team of actual U.S. lawmakers and then competes against other teams. Andrew Lee, a senior at Claremont McKenna College in the greater Los Angeles area and one of the game’s creators, said lawmakers were ranked based on the progress of their proposed legislation, picking up points on its journey to possibly getting passed into law.

Lee said he hoped the game would inspire people to pay as much attention to politics as they do to sports.

"If people cared about politics as much as they care about sports, we’d have a better democracy," said Lee, who described himself as "obsessed with politics." "Congress needs to know that young people are watching them, just as they watch sports teams and athletes."

In the countdown to the November 7 elections, "Fantasy Congress" has started to pick up momentum, attracting about 6,000 participants from a number of U.S. states as well as overseas.

The current Congress is in recess until after the elections, with the 110th U.S. congressional session to run for two years starting in January, so players are now replaying the month of September.

The creators said they are funding the game with $5,000 in prize money from winning a school-sponsored Web-based entrepreneur of the year award and volunteer labor.

A recent study found that fantasy football costs employers as much as $1.1 billion a week in lost productivity during the National Football League regular season, when nearly 37 million people spent an average of 50 minutes per week at work managing their fantasy teams.

While Lee did not expect "Fantasy Congress" to immediately have quite the same impact, he does hope that the game will inspire more young people to become lawmakers.

"It would be better if we had more kids who wanted to be members of Congress. It's just not exciting. We're hoping to make it more exciting for them," Lee told Reuters.

Pirates, Sexy Women Popular Online Costume Searches

Pirates and sexy women will soon roam the streets, if online activity is any indicator.

"Pirate costumes" was the leading costume-specific search, while Tinkerbell, Wonder Woman, Jack Sparrow and Playboy bunnies also ranked among the top five in the four weeks ending Oct. 21, according to Hitwise, an online intelligence and metrics service.

Searches for "adult costumes" were up 209 percent from the same time last year, as visits to Halloween retailers rose by 39 percent. Searches for "sexy Halloween costume" were up 400 percent. On Google, those searches yield lingerie shops and regular Halloween retailers.

One of the top sites to come up offers a "Wizard Wanda" costume, complete with a school-girl-style dress and tie, though it's doubtful the length would meet private school standards. The cape probably wouldn't go over well either. Then, there is a "Playboy Hipster Witch," who looks like she will be hanging out in New York City's East Village, though she may be looking for the 80s. For a Euro-flair, there's a "Candy Corn Witch," with a peasant top gartered dress with bright orange and white thigh-high socks.

According to Hitwise, the most visited Halloween costume site was BuyCustomes.com, which features a "Seductive Evil Queen," holding a bright red apple and wearing fishnet stockings. The site drew 30 percent of category visits for the week ending Oct. 21. Annie's Costumes, which takes a more family-oriented approach on its home page, followed as the second most popular costume Web site with 7.01 percent of the traffic. Spirit Halloween, another site featuring plenty of school girl costumes to "heat up the party" was close behind, with 7.0 percent.

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